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ABSTRACT

This report focuses on some of the changes that have taken place in the American family over the last several decades. In order to produce reform efforts that will achieve the six National Education Goals, communities need to understand how family life has changed in recent years and why the schools need to be redesigned to fit the way today's children and families live and work. First a statistical "snapshot" of today's families and today's children in given. Statistics, provided in bulleted and tabular form, are given in these areas: (1) marriage and divorce; (2) birth rate; (3) married couple versus single parent families; (4) parents' employment (labor force participation); (5) children in poverty and female-headed households; (6) educational achievement of parents and youth; and (7) drug use among high school seniors. Tables and graphs are provided in the appendix. (ABL)

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Issue Briefs

Today's Families and Today's Children: A Snapshot

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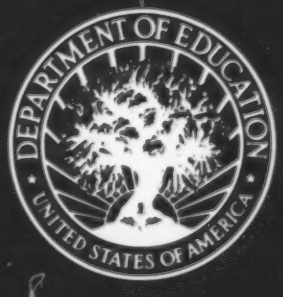

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Office of Policy and Planning

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Issue Briefs

Today's Families and Today's Children: A Snapshot

This report focuses on some of the changes in the American family over the last several decades. The information is intended to help communities understand how family life has changed in recent years and why we need to redesign our schools to fit the needs of today's families and today's children. This brief was prepared by Michele Cavataio at the Office of Policy and Planning.

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"If we want to change the country we need to change our schools, and these schools must meet the needs of today's families and today's children."

~ Lamar Alexander

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF POLICY AND PLANNING

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

Many children attend schools designed for an America that existed in 1950. It was a time when most families had two parents and one income, when education standards were different, and when adults rarely changed jobs. Our classrooms and school calendars were designed for a static, agrarian society which no longer exists. Our economy has changed and so have our families and our children, but too many schools have stayed about the same.

The AMERICA 2000 education strategy, designed to move the country in the direction of achieving the six National Education Goals, is a school-by-school, community-by-community effort to create the best schools in the world for all our children. These schools must meet the needs of today's families and today's children. That's why AMERICA 2000 is asking every community in the nation to:

- Adopt the six National Education Goals;
- Develop a community-wide strategy to achieve them;
- Design a report card to measure results; and
- Plan for and support a New American School.

Already, many communities are rethinking the way schools teach and their children learn. They are creating a new generation of schools that fit today's families. They are starting from scratch and asking questions that were never considered 100, 40 or even 10 years ago.

This *Issue Brief* focuses on some of the changes that have taken place in the American family over the last several decades. Much has changed since the two-parent, single-income family of the 1950s. This information can help communities understand how family life has changed in recent years and why we need to redesign our schools to fit the way today's children and families live and work.

~ Bruno V. Manno

400 MARYLAND AVE., S.W. WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202-8100

Today's Families and Today's Children:
A Snapshot

- Since 1950, the divorce rate has more than doubled and the number of children who must cope with divorce has more than tripled.

- The divorce rate peaked in 1979 at 23 divorces per 1000 married women and has dropped to about 21 per 1000 since then.

- The birth rate for unmarried women has more than doubled since 1950.

- Since 1950, three times more children live in single parent families, and for 30 years, most of those families (88%) have been headed by women.

- The proportion of poor children living with single mothers has more than doubled since 1960.

- Three out of four children live in households with both parents – but in more than half of those households, both parents work.

- Since 1950, the proportion of married women in the labor force who have school-age children has nearly tripled, and the proportion with children under six has increased five fold.

- The percentage of families living in poverty stands at 12% today, down from 20.8% in 1959.

- Today, more than twice as many people over 25 have completed high school and three times as many have completed college than in 1950.

- Since 1967, the percentage of high school dropouts among 16 to 24 year olds has decreased by 29% for all races and by 52% for blacks.

Marriage and Divorce

- Both men and women are marrying at an older age for their first marriages.

Age at first marriage

	1950	1990
Male	23 yrs	25
Female	20	24

- The divorce rate has more than doubled since 1950.

  1950: 10 divorces per 1,000 marriages (385,000 divorces)
  1990: 21 divorces per 1,000 marriages (1,166,000 divorces)

- More and more children are involved in a divorce each year. The number of children who must cope with divorce has more than tripled since 1950.

  1950: 299,000
  1990: 1,038, 000

- Even though the divorce rate remains high, it peaked in 1979 at 23 divorces per 1000 married women and has dropped to about 21 per 1000 since then.

Birth Rate

- The birth rate has declined by over one-third.

  1950: 106 live births per 1,000 women
  1990: 67 live births per 1,000 women

- However, this decline has been greater for whites than for minorities. In fact, over the last 10 years, the birth rate has gone up for some segments of the population, these include:

  - white women over 30
  - other races beginning at the earliest ages (15+)

- The birth rate for unmarried women has nearly tripled compared to 1950.

  1950: 14 live births per 1,000 women
  1990: 38 live births per 1,000 women

- The statistics are significantly different by race. The birth rate for unmarried white women increased 400% while the birth rate for other unmarried women increased by 13%.

Birth rates for unmarried women
(per 1000 live births)

	1950	1990	change
Whites	6	26	+400%
All others	71	81	+13%

Married Couple vs. Single Parent Families

- Three times more children live in single parent families than in 1950.

Proportion of children in single parent families

1950: 7%
1990: 22% (tripled)

- The proportion of single parent families has been increasing for all races.

Proportion of single parent families by race

	1970	1990
White	5%	9%
Black	20%	32%
Hispanic	15%	18%

- Today, more than one-half (54%) of African-American children live in single parent homes.
- For the past 30 years, the proportion of single parent families headed by females has remained at 88%.
- Three out of four school-age children live with both parents -- but in more than half of those households, both parents work at least part time.

Parents' Employment (labor force participation)

- Both parents are increasingly working outside the home.

Proportion of families where both parents employed:

1975: 37%
1990: 58%

- The proportion of married, separated or divorced mothers who work and have children has increased significantly since 1950.

The proportion of married, separated or divorced mothers in the labor force

	1950	1990	change
children under 6	12%	59%	(5 times)
children age 6-17	28%	74%	(2.5 times)

- There has been a five fold increase in the number of married women with children under six who work outside the home.

Proportion of mothers in the labor force

with children under 6

	1950	1970	1990
married	12%	30%	59%
separated	--	45%	59%
divorced	--	65%	70%

- Today, nearly 75% of married women with children between 6-17 work outside the home -- the percentages are even higher if separated or divorced.

Proportion of mothers in the labor force

with children 6-17 yrs

	1950	1970	1990
married	28%	49%	74%
separated	--	60%	75%
divorced	--	83%	86%

Children in Poverty and Female-headed Households

- More than half of poor children live with a single mother who is head of the household.

Proportion of poor children who live with single mothers

	1960	1990
All families	24%	57%

- The proportion of poor children living with single mothers has more than doubled since 1960.

Proportion of poor children who live with single mothers (by race)

	1960	1990
White	21%	46%
African-American	29%	77%
Hispanic	n.a.	47%

- The proportion of children in families living below the poverty line has declined from 26.9% in 1959 to 19.9% today.
- The percentage of children in female-headed households who live below the poverty line has declined from 72.2% in 1959 to 53.4% today.

Educational Achievement of Parents and Youth

- Parents of today's children are better educated. Twice as many people over 25 have completed high school and three times as many have completed college than in 1950.

Years of school completed by persons over 25

	4 or more years high school	4 or more years of college
1950	34.3%	6.2%
1990	77.6%	21.3%

- The percentage of high school dropouts among 16 to 24 year olds has decreased for all races but especially for blacks.

Percentage of high school dropouts

	1967	1989
all races	17.0%	12.6%
blacks	28.6%	13.8%

- The number of women receiving bachelor's degrees increased 31.5% from 1976 to 1990.

Bachelor's degrees to women

1976	423,476
1990	556,829

Drug Use Among High School Seniors

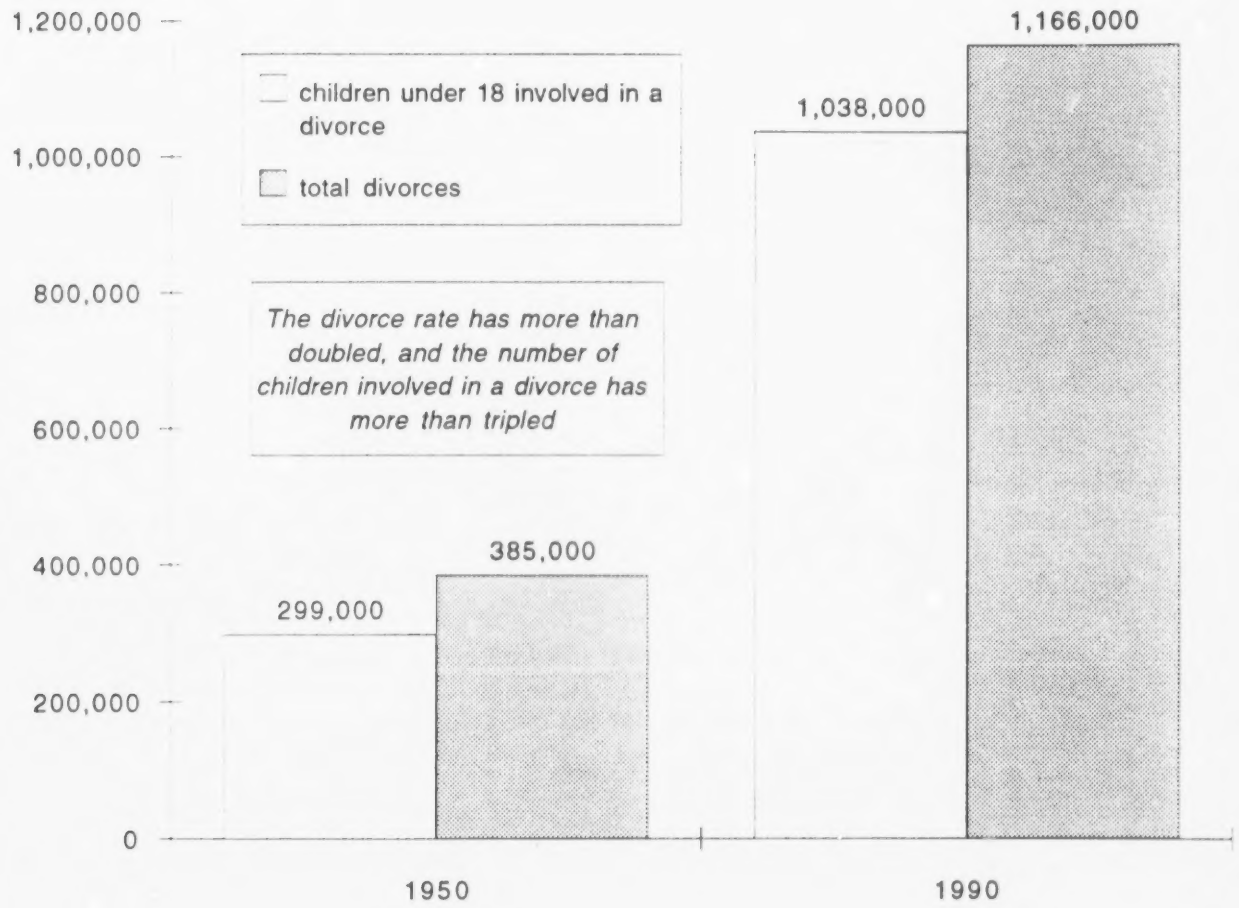
- Drug use has decreased among high school seniors since 1975.

Percentage reporting ever having used illicit drugs

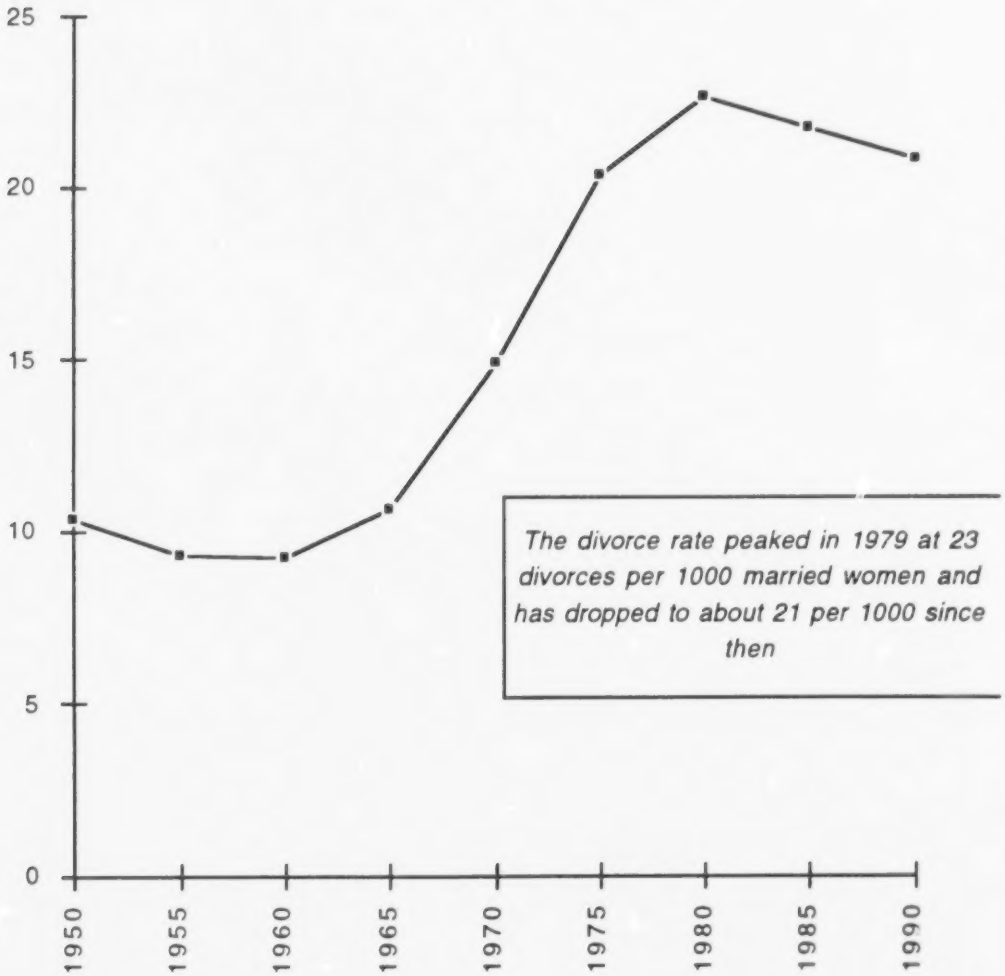
Class of 1975	Class of 1980	Class of 1990
55.2%	65.4%	47.9%

Appendix
Tables and Graphs

NUMBER OF DIVORCES AND NUMBER OF CHILDREN AFFECTED

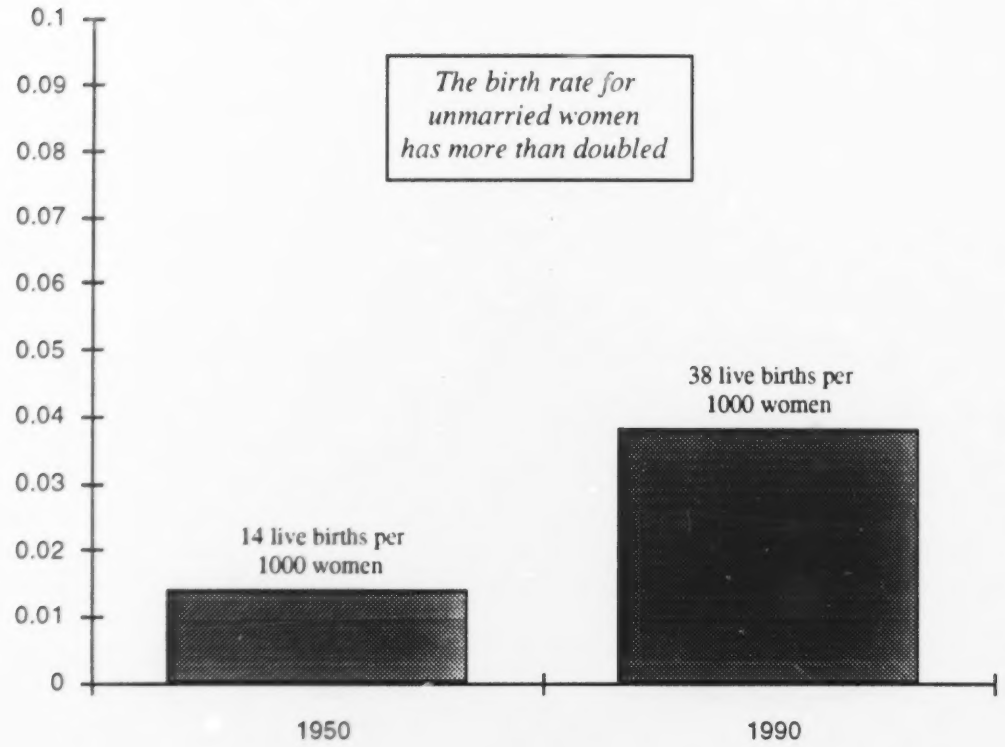


NUMBER OF DIVORCES PER 1000 MARRIED WOMEN OVER AGE 15



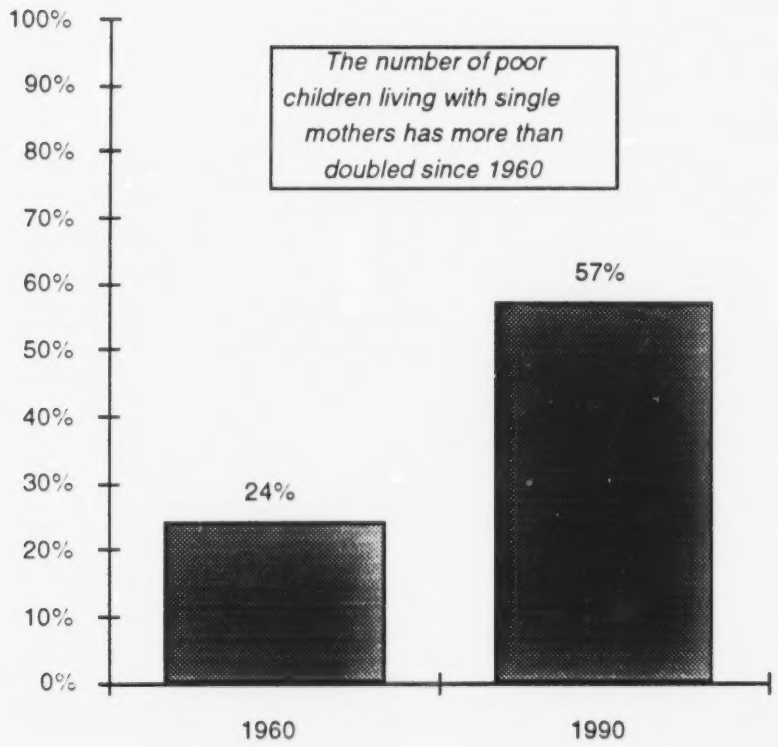
Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics.

BIRTH RATE FOR UNMARRIED WOMEN



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics.

PROPORTION OF POOR CHILDREN LIVING WITH SINGLE MOTHERS



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. Current Population Reports, Series P-20.

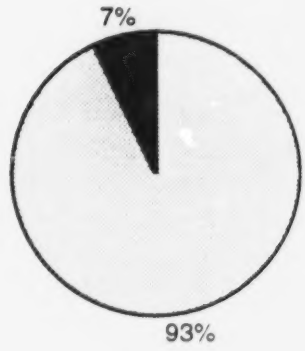
LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF CHILDREN UNDER 18

Three times more children live in single parent families

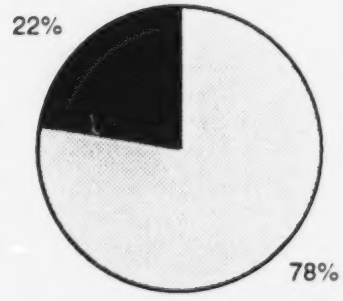
□ two parents

■ one parent

1960

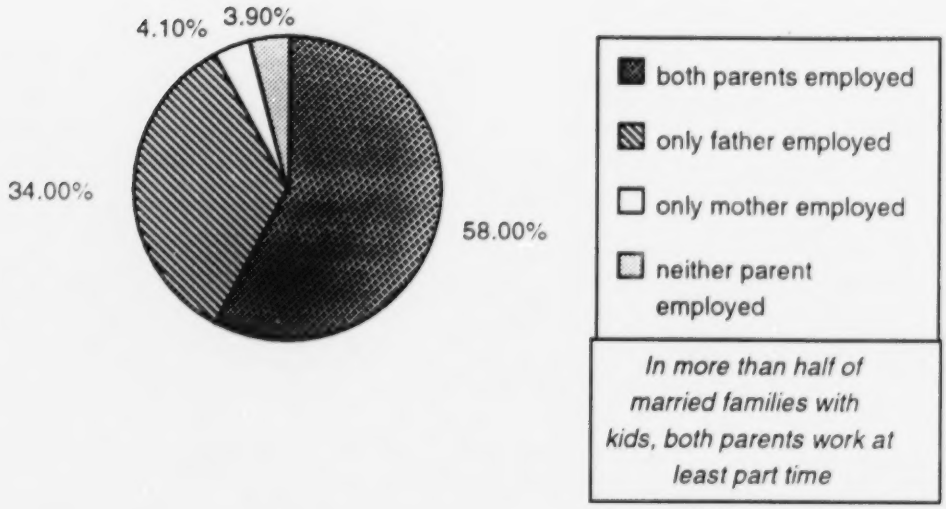


1990



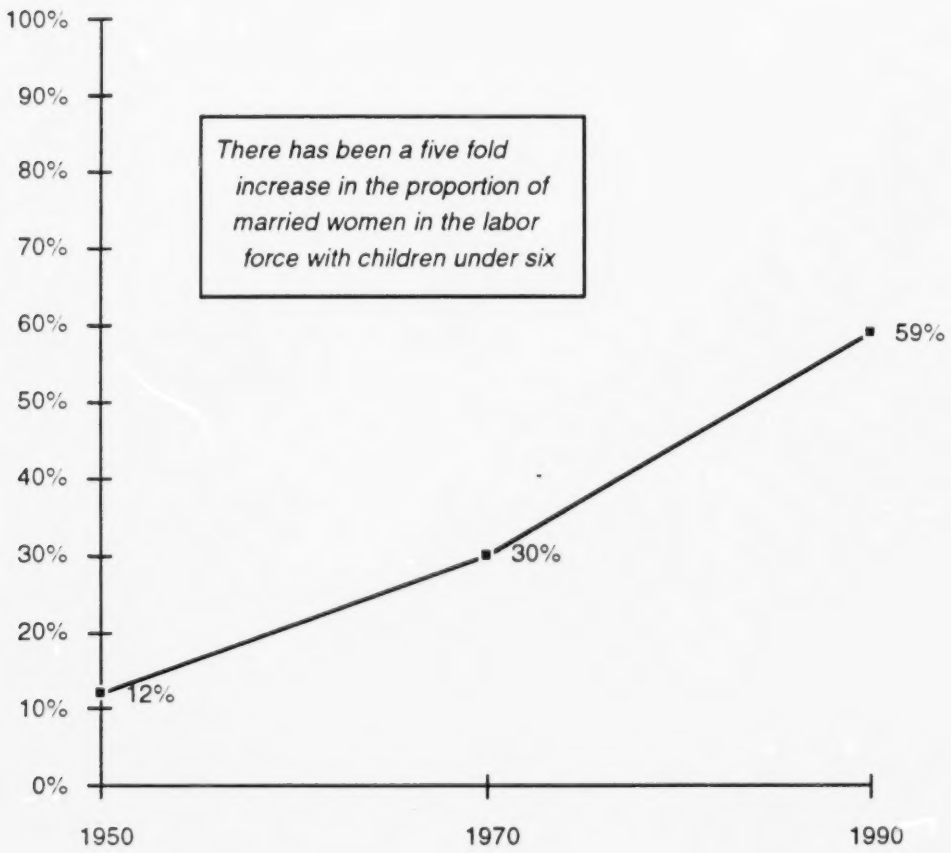
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census., Current Population Reports, Series P-20.

EMPLOYMENT AMONG MARRIED PARENTS WHO HAVE CHILDREN UNDER 18
1988



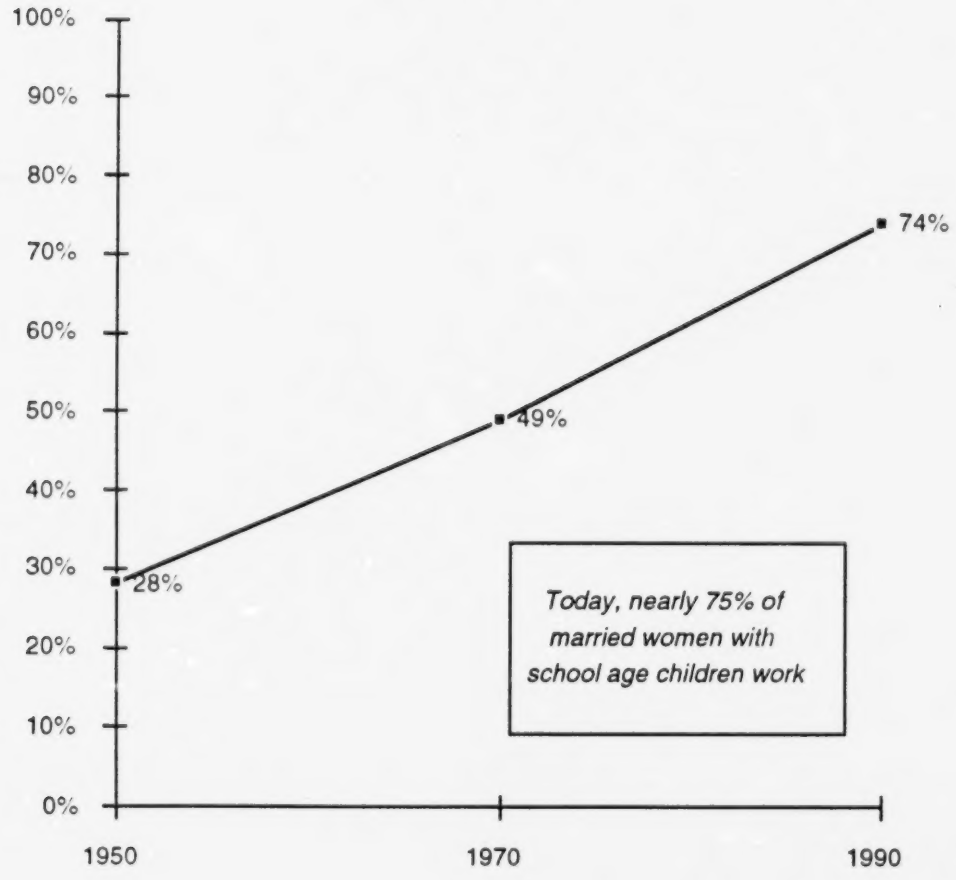
Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Unpublished Data.

PROPORTION OF MARRIED WOMEN IN THE LABOR FORCE WITH CHILDREN UNDER SIX



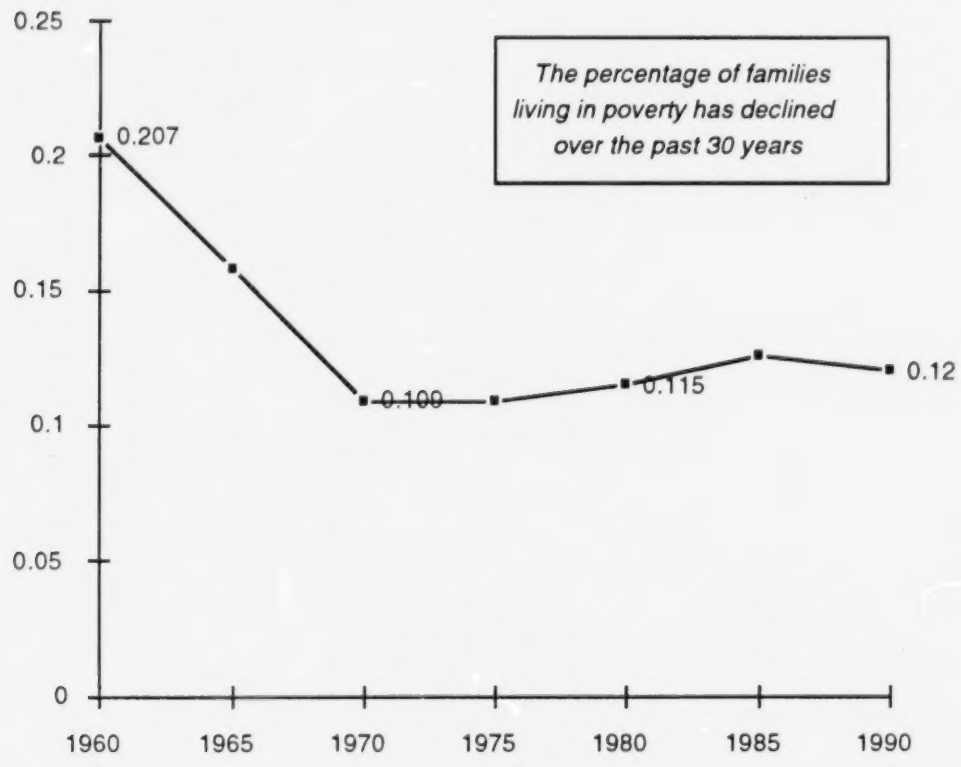
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Special Labor Force Reports*.

PROPORTION OF MARRIED WOMEN IN THE LABOR FORCE WITH SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN



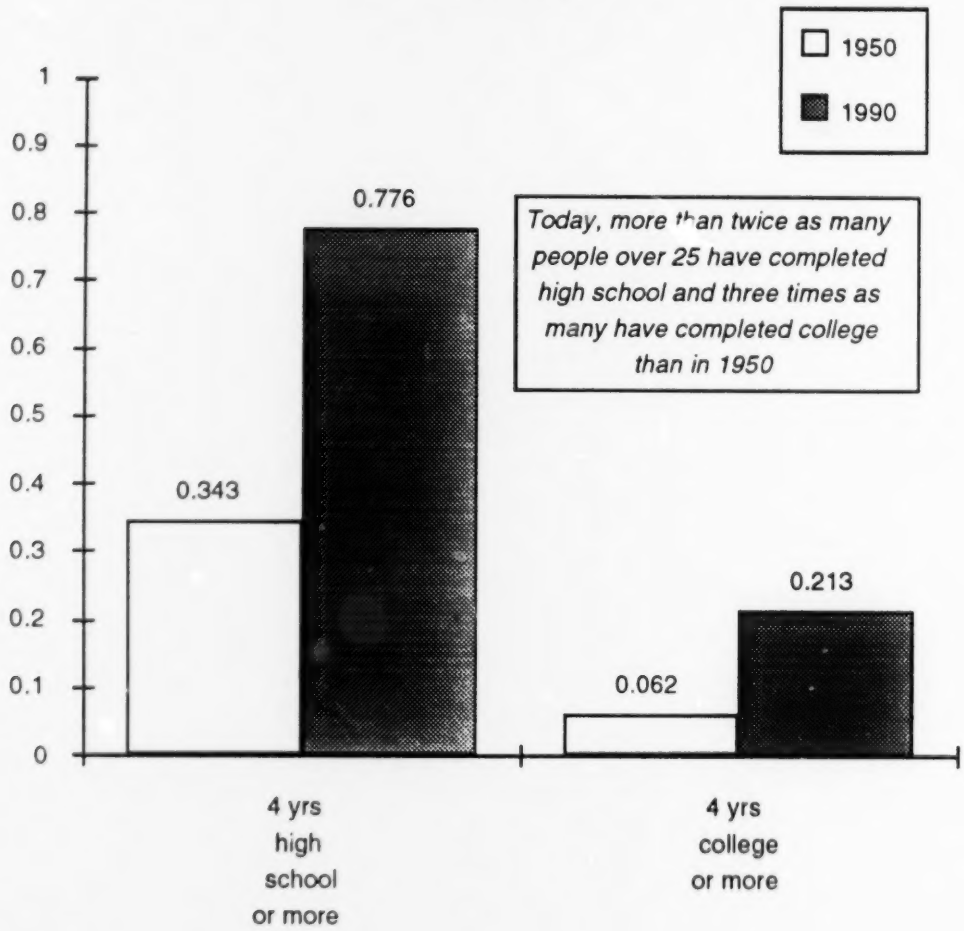
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Special Labor Force Reports*.

PERCENT OF FAMILIES WITH INCOMES BELOW THE POVERTY LINE



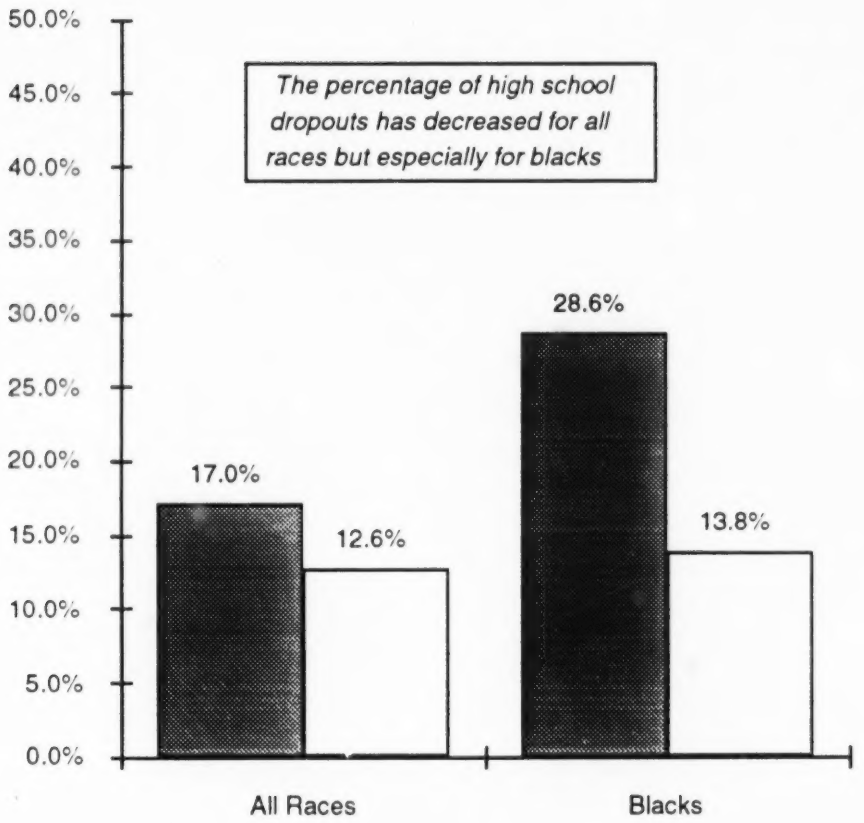
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-60.

YEARS OF SCHOOL COMPLETED BY PERSONS OVER 25



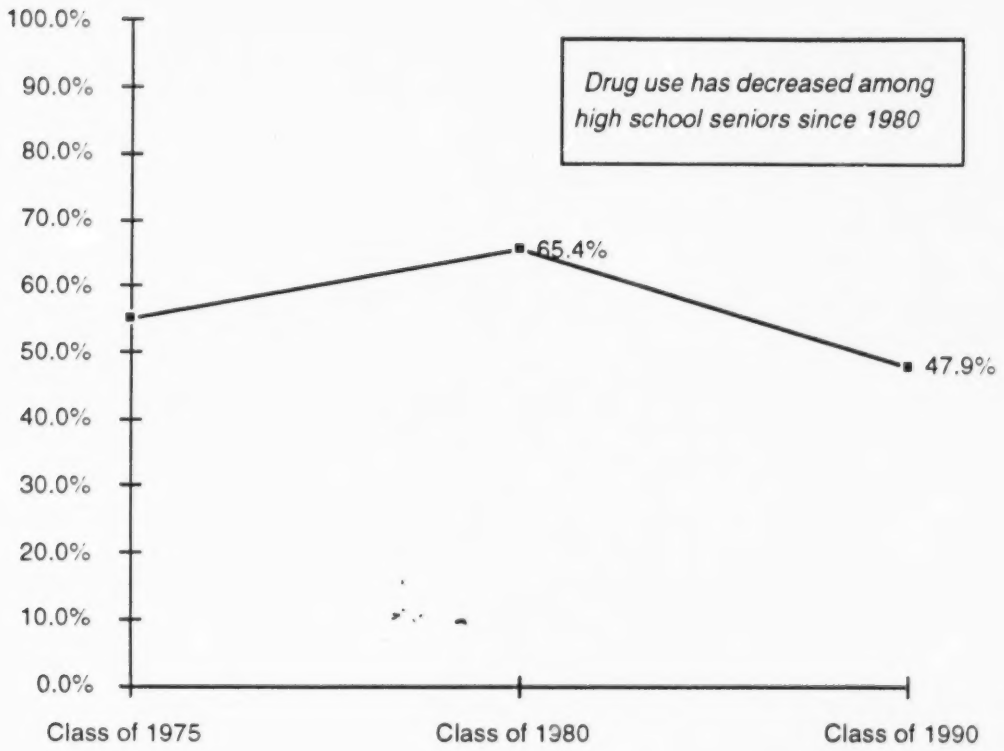
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports

PERCENTAGE OF HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS AMONG 16-24 YR OLDS



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports.

PERCENTAGE OF HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS REPORTING EVER HAVING USED ILLICIT DRUGS



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration, *Drug Use Among American High School Students and Other Young Adults, National Trends Through 1988* and press release dated January 1992.